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United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

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3/7. Marine litter and microplastics

The United Nations Environment Assembly,

Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and recalling Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to "prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution",

Recalling its resolutions 1/6, entitled "Marine plastic debris and microplastics," and 2/11, entitled "Marine plastic litter and microplastics," on measures to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics,

Acknowledging the increased knowledge on the levels, sources, negative effects of and measures to reduce marine litter and microplastics, as summarized in the 2016 assessment report by the United Nations Environment Programme entitled *Marine plastic debris and microplastics: Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change*, the First World Ocean Assessment and numerous other reports and scientific publications,

Noting the report entitled "Combating marine plastic litter and microplastics: An assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches" prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme pursuant to Environment Assembly resolution 2/11,

Noting also the commitment of member States to the "Our ocean, our future: call for action" declaration, adopted at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, in June 2017, and the voluntary commitments presented there, at the Our Ocean conferences held in Washington D.C., Valparaiso, Chile, and Valletta, Malta, and at the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, as well as the Group of 20 Action Plan on Marine Litter adopted in 2017, on efforts to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics,

Noting further the International Coral Reef Initiative recommendation to reduce plastic microbead pollution in the marine environment, adopted in November 2016, and the call for action by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme on plastic microbeads,

Noting with concern the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine plastic litter and the expected increase in negative effects on marine biodiversity, ecosystems, animal well-being, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation and tourism, local societies and economies, and the urgent need for strengthened knowledge of the levels and effects of microplastics and nanoplastics on marine ecosystems, seafood and human health,

Recognizing with concern that natural disasters and increasingly severe weather events cause significant input of litter and microplastics to the marine environment,

Underlining that preventive action through waste minimization and environmentally sound waste management should be given the highest priority and that that is especially important in geographical areas with the largest sources of marine plastic litter, and recognizing that technology and effective measures already exist that may provide cost-effective, environmentally sound and locally and regionally adapted solutions,

Emphasizing that technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and resource mobilization from all sources are important elements to combating marine litter and microplastics,

Acknowledging the challenges of addressing marine plastic pollution in the face of increasing production and consumption of plastic in products and packaging, and urging all countries and other stakeholders to make responsible use of plastic while endeavouring to reduce the unnecessary use of plastic and to promote research and application of environmentally sound alternatives,

1. *Stresses* the importance of long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics;

2. *Urges* all actors to step up actions to "by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution";

3. *Encourages* all member States, based on best available knowledge of sources and levels of marine litter and microplastics in the environment, to prioritize policies and measures at the appropriate scale to avoid marine litter and microplastics from entering the marine environment;

4. *Also encourages* all member States and invites other actors, taking into account national conditions:

(a) To fully implement the recommendations and actions set out in its resolutions 1/6 and 2/11, as relevant, and emphasizes that those resolutions have important elements and guidance that are not repeated in the present resolution;

(b) To cooperate to establish common definitions and harmonized standards and methodologies for the measurement and monitoring of marine litter and microplastics;

(c) To develop and implement action plans for preventing marine litter and the discharge of microplastics; encouraging resource efficiency, and increasing collection and recycling rates of plastic waste and re-design and re-use of products and materials; and avoiding the unnecessary use of plastic and plastic containing chemicals of particular concern where appropriate;

(d) To include marine litter and microplastics in local, national and regional waste management plans and in wastewater treatment where appropriate;

(e) To develop integrated and source-to-sea approaches to combat marine litter and microplastics from all sources, taking into account that plastic litter and microplastics are transported to the oceans from land-based sources by rivers and run-off or wind from land and that plastic litter is an important source of microplastics, and include the land/sea and freshwater/sea interface in action plans for preventing marine litter, including microplastics;

(f) To step up measures to prevent marine litter and the discharge of microplastics from sea-based sources, such as fisheries, aquaculture, off-shore installations and shipping, including through the promotion of accessibility and use of port reception facilities;

(g) To encourage the inclusion of measures to prevent marine litter and the discharge of microplastics, in particular from land-based sources, in plans to prevent and reduce damage from natural disasters and increasingly severe weather events;

(h) To prioritize, where feasible, clean-up of the marine environment in areas where marine litter poses a significant threat to human health, biodiversity, wildlife and the coastal ecosystems, conducted in a cost-effective way;

5. *Recognizes* that the private sector and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, can contribute significantly to preventing and reducing marine litter and microplastics, including through information sharing, awareness-raising, developing new environmentally sound technologies, capacity-building and clean-up actions, and encourages cooperation between

Governments, regional bodies, the private sector and civil society, including through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and its regional nodes, to that end;

6. *Notes* the important role of key sectors such as plastics producers, retailers and the consumer goods industry, as well as importers, packaging firms and transport firms, to contribute to the reduction of marine litter, including microplastics, arising from their products and activities, as well as to provide information on the impacts arising from their products throughout their life cycle, and encourages innovative approaches such as the use of extended producer responsibility schemes, container deposit schemes and other initiatives;

7. *Requests* the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, to strengthen the capacity and activity of the United Nations Environment Programme on marine litter and microplastics, including by:

(a) Strengthening the contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the Global Partnership on Marine Litter;

(b) Providing advice on the prioritizing of activities upon request based on best available scientific knowledge, and the most environmentally sound and cost-effective measures to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics, according to resolutions 1/6 and 2/11 and the present resolution;

(c) Facilitating the establishment and implementation of regional and national action plans to prevent and reduce litter and microplastics in the marine environment, as requested by member States;

(d) Supporting countries, upon request and in collaboration with other international organizations and relevant stakeholders, in closing data gaps and improving the availability of accessible data on the sources and extent of marine litter and microplastics in the environment;

(e) Closely liaising with other United Nations agencies to encourage them to support programmes to reduce marine litter and microplastics;

8. *Invites* relevant international and regional organizations and conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the International Maritime Organization and its conventions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, regional seas conventions and programmes, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, as appropriate within their mandates, to increase their action to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics and their harmful effects and to coordinate where appropriate to achieve that end;

9. *Requests* the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources and in cooperation with other relevant bodies and international initiatives, to compile voluntary commitments, as applicable, targeting marine litter and microplastics; to provide an overview of their scope in support of the work of the United Nations Environment Assembly on that issue; to better understand progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 14.1; and to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the matter;

10. *Decides* to convene, subject to the availability of resources, meetings of an open-ended ad hoc expert group to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources, and:

(a) Requests the Executive Director to provide the secretariat for that work;

(b) Decides that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will be informed by and build on, among others, relevant resolutions, decisions and reports by the United Nations Environment Programme, other organizations, member States and stakeholders as appropriate;

(c) Decides that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will include experts with the relevant technical expertise from all member States, representation from international and regional conventions and organizations and relevant stakeholders;

(d) Decides that the open-ended ad hoc expert group will have the following initial programme of work:

(i) To explore all barriers to combating marine litter and microplastics, including challenges related to resources in developing countries;

(ii) To identify the range of national, regional and international response options, including actions and innovative approaches, and voluntary and legally binding governance strategies and approaches;

(iii) To identify environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of different response options;

(iv) To examine the feasibility and effectiveness of different response options;

(v) To identify potential options for continued work for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly;

(e) *Decides* to convene at least one meeting, but no more than two meetings, before the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, including enabling the participation of developing countries;

(f) *Requests* the Executive Director to provide a progress update to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the programme of work, including on the results of the meeting(s);

(g) *Decides* to determine the future direction, timing and expected outcomes of the work at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly;

11. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session on the implementation of its resolutions 1/6 and 2/11 and the present resolution.